

## Home Readings

Belshazzar's Feast. Dan. 5:1-9.  
 Daniel Called. Dan. 5:10-16.  
 Handwriting on the Wall. Dan. 5:17-31.  
 The Temple Vessels. Jer. 52:12-19.  
 Prophecy Against Babylon. Jer. 51:47-58.  
 Herod's Punishment. Acts 12:18-23.  
 Found Wanting. Luke 12:13-21.

## Introduction

The events of this lesson took place forty or fifty years after the last one. Babylon was now the most magnificent and beautiful city of antiquity. Nabonidus was king, and from recently discovered tablets we learn that he had a son Belshazzar. Tho quite young it is altogether likely that he was acting as king in Babylon during his father's temporary absence. The city was surrounded by the army of Cyrus, but the king fancied himself secure within its walls, and at the very time when his fate was trembling in the balances, he and a thousand of his lords were spending the night in feasting, carousing, revelry and drunkenness, apparently unconscious of the impending danger. It was a false security. No stone walls can withhold the hand of God when judgment is due. In his drunkenness the king ordered the sacred vessels to be brought and filled with wine and from these he and his lords drank freely as if in defiance of the Almighty, and with it they praised the gods of the Persians and mocked the God of the Jews. But the end had come. In an unexpected moment, suddenly a strange hand appeared and wrote mysterious words on the wall of the room in which the king and his lords were spending the night in revelry. The king was so frightened that his face grew pale and his knees trembled. He at once called for the wise men of the kingdom, but they were powerless in the presence of those words. The queen had not forgotten Daniel, and he was called. In the presence of the king he told him the meaning of the words.

## The Text Applied

1. *He Drank Wine.*—In the first verse of this chapter we are told that Belshazzar the king drank wine before the thousands. Here was the beginning of the crime. When will men and women learn sense enough to know that this drinking of wine and other liquors is the cause of about three-fourths of all the crimes in the country? This ancient drunken orgy was not very unlike thousands of others, especially in our large cities, and retribution will come, perhaps not in the same way, but just as surely, for the same God reigns. In all ages this drinking of strong drink has been the inspiration of sins and crime without number. When will people cease this reveling, this dallying with hell fire?

2. *Not the First.*—This was not the first warning given to Belshazzar, as may be seen from the narrative of the lesson. Note how Daniel goes back to show the king how these warnings have been disregarded. Calls of mercy had come to him, but they were despised. Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the ruin

of the kingdom was one of these warnings; the closing of the siege of Cyrus about the city was another. This last warning of retribution came too late, for the king had disregarded the former warnings of mercy. These warnings come to each one of us. The hand on the wall has not ceased. God's hand is ever writing words before our eyes, but humanity is unbelievably blind and cannot interpret the meaning of the writing. If men were not stupid in spiritual things they might see their own doom written in letters of living light. Those who revel in drunkenness have the hand writing of past experiences, which tells them in unmistakable language the end of such a life of revelry. Do they take heed? They go on in their madness until the last writing will have appeared and their doom is sealed. Every one who follows in the way of sin is writing his own doom on the wall of memory, and it does not require a Daniel to interpret the meaning of the writing.

3. *Weighed in the Balances.*—Every human life is on trial before the judge of all the earth. Our days are being numbered; our life is being weighed in the balances of God. Every act is weighed, every thought, and every word. To each one of us there will come an end, a last numbering and weighing. What will the end be? What will be finished when our life with all its work is numbered? Have we used our opportunities, our talents, our time? Many a life that began fair and beautiful and had fine opportunities, ended as did that of Belshazzar. If our last numbering is to be one of joy and gladness, we need to see to it that each day as it passes is properly numbered, filled with sweet thoughts, loving deeds, duty well done.

## The Sins of Belshazzar

## Selected.

Daniel in his arraignment of Belshazzar specifies certain sins which incurred God's wrath and brought God's punishment. It is well for us to ask ourselves if these sins are ever committed in modern days, if we ever commit them.

1. *Pride.* Many men, like Belshazzar, have fallen when they considered themselves strong. Pride and vainglory bring poverty to the millionaire, defeat to the military general, discomfiture to every man and woman in business and in society, and, what is more to our purpose, moral overthrow to the Christian. We will not ask each other if we have ever met people in the world or in the church who are sinfully proud. Ask, rather, Am I? Does it take the form of self-conceit in me, or of defiance of authority, or of contempt for others.

2. *Pleasure.* Once God gave into the hands of Ulysses S. Grant the welfare of our country; for the fate of the country in that emergency depended on the army, and the army depended on Grant. Suppose that Grant had brought to his camp a large number of jolly minded men and women, and had spent his days and nights in revelry. That is what Belshazzar did; it is what Grant did not. It is what many a man and

woman who maintain a good position in society are tempted in their measure to do. God has given to you and to me, for example, great responsibilities. It is a wonderful trust that God gives when he makes a man a voter. It is a great trust God gives us when he permits us to become members of his church. All opportunities for usefulness in society, for the help of the poor, for intellectual training, are trusts confided in us by God. Do we ever dance and sing our way thru them in a spirit of levity, disdaining the talents God has intrusted us with?

3. *Drunkenness.* In this sin, for the whole narrative intimates that this sin was indulged in, Belshazzar has his followers still, who sometimes feel his terrors in an awakening conscience. There is no sin more frequently reprov'd in the Bible than the sin of drunkenness.

4. *Idolatry.* These revelers praised the gods of wood and stone. Few in America do that now, but many in America worship idols. Do we? There is idolatry in the worship of present success, of national aggrandizement, in the devotion of life to merely material aims. There are some young men and women in business and social life over whose interests there is written MENE, TEKEL, PERES, altho they know it not.

5. *Irreverence.* Belshazzar took as a means for rioting the vessels of God's house, and so showed his contempt for God. Every man who takes God's name in vain upon his lips, who makes use of membership in God's church to get trade or votes or social influence, and holds God's day in contempt, commits this sin. Do we?

## Terse Teachings

## Selected.

1. Only true men can speak for God.
2. God is sure to prove himself God.
3. Patriotism's peril is personal impiety.
4. Appetite set free makes a slave of the soul.
5. In life's supreme moments only the pure are strong.
6. God's judgments are not measured in man's scales.
7. The dregs of remorse are in every cup of unholy revelry.
8. When rulers feast themselves, the nation's doom is written.
9. Only the finger of God can truly write the judgment of a life.
10. Tho God's judgments may be stayed, men's acts are all weighed.
11. There is faith for the saint and fear for the sinner in the mighty truth that God reigns.
12. Belshazzar invited a thousand lords to his feast, but the Lord over all was there uninvited.

Consider sweetness of temper and activity of mind, if they naturally belong to you, as talents of special worth and utility, for which you will have to give account. Carefully watch against whatever might impair them; keep them in continual exercise, and direct them to their highest ends.—Bishop Wilberforce.